Distributive Justice and Female Longevity[1]

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Abstract

This paper discusses Philippe Van Parijs' claim that men's lack of female longevity constitutes an injustice, whether this is caused by asocial factors or by gendered lifestyles. This response argues that, like others, such as John Kekes and Shlomi Segall, Van Parijs underestimates the resources of egalitarian liberalism to avoid this implication. One explanation treats individuals as liable for gendered life-shortening behavior, for example, when they value either life-shortening lifestyles or the choice between lifestyles, and one cannot say society has not "done enough" for them. A second explanation claims a trait is not a relative advantage when it is systematically part of a package of traits that do not constitute a relative advantage. A third explanation claims a trait is not an advantage when its value to the trait bearer is conditional, and the relevant conditions are unlikely to be fulfilled.

Keywords: R. M. Dworkin, hypothetical insurance, John Kekes, gender, natural and social inequality, T. M. Scanlon, Shlomi Segall

INTRODUCTION

In "Four Puzzles on Gender inequality" (2015), Philippe Van Parijs presents his first puzzle thus: *"As long as most people would be willing to give up some income in order to live longer, women's higher life expectancy reduces the inequality between men and women"* (2015: 82). This first puzzle is probably the most familiar of the four Van Parijs addresses. For example, when John Kekes (1997) sets out to discredit egalitarian liberalism, he uses the idea of women having to compensate men for lacking female longevity as a *reductio*

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of the targeted view.[2] Rather than finding it absurd to treat women as relatively advantaged by their greater longevity, Van Parijs cannot think of a way to avoid the conclusion. He envisions only two ways to challenge it. One is to claim that greater female longevity is either (i) due to men's lifestyle and, therefore, something men are liable for, or (ii) biologically-based and, thus, something justice does not require society to amend. He states that (i) is not available to those who hold that social norms shape gender-specific lifestyles, and (ii) is not an option for those who believe just institutions should also reduce inequalities derived from natural talents or disabilities (82). A final option he considers involves denying female longevity is a significant benefit, given the way those final years are spent. I shall follow this useful map to describe in more detail the territory it charts, and draw some routes he does not consider. Like Van Parijs, I shall not establish the facts, but focus on the normative implications of different factual assumptions.

Kekes finds the idea of compensating men for their lower longevity particularly ridiculous because he regards the variation as a product of biology rather than of unjust social practices (1997: 104). However, I agree with Van Parijs that it is not plausible to regard greater female longevity as an entirely asocial phenomenon and then argue that only inequalities that are socially generated can be unjust (Nagel 1997; Daniels 2007; Pogge 1989: secs. 15-16, 1995 and 2000). Along with Kekes, and others such as Shlomi Segall (2010: 105-10), Van Parijs gives the impression that liberal egalitarianism lacks the resources to deny plausibly that it is unjust that men lack female longevity. In contrast, I shall argue that there are plausible liberal egalitarian views that hold individuals liable for the harmful consequences of their gendered lifestyles, and that deny that individuals lacking a certain trait are owed compensation when they identify with their trait-destroying lifestyles or when they value having the *choice* between different lifestyles. Furthermore, even if we assume the variation in longevity between men and women depends entirely on asocial factors, plausible liberal egalitarian responses are still available. One such response claims a trait is not a relative advantage when it is systematically part of a package of traits that do not constitute a relative advantage. A final option, which Van Parijs also considers, is to deny a trait has value to the trait bearer if its value is conditional, and the relevant conditions are unlikely to be fulfilled.

I shall proceed to examine the options just noted, referring both to mainstream normative theories and to scientific explanations. My main hope

2 For convenience, like Van Parijs, I shall compare men and women; and like Kekes, I shall refer to "compensations." The relevant measure, however, is not how far individuals or groups are from one another but how far they are from what they would have in a just society.

is to show the complexity of Van Parijs' first puzzle. Some deem compensating men for their lesser longevity obviously absurd whilst others find it just as obvious that liberal equality rightly mandates such compensations. In contrast, I think that both reactions are mistaken, and that the puzzle is not only very difficult but also an interesting litmus test to sort important variants of plausible forms of egalitarian liberalism. I am also sure that if a random mutation resulted in women starting to die far ahead of men many of those who currently find Van Parijs' suggestion absurd would start listing lesser longevity as one of the disadvantages women suffer. But I shall leave the defense of his position to Van Parijs, and focus on some plausible responses liberal egalitarians could give, and which he has so far neglected.

2. THE SOCIAL HYPOTHESIS: LIFE-SHORTENING GENDERED BEHAVIOUR

Although women live longer *on average* than men, there are remarkable differences in the variation among different societies. This suggests that social factors play some important role in explaining gender-based variations in longevity. For example, in 2013 women outlived men by twelve years in Belarus, but only by one year in San Marino, and men outlived women by four years in Tonga (WHO 2015). In Europe, women outlive men by eleven years in Lithuania, while in more gender egalitarian societies like Sweden, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, the gender gap is just around three years (Eurostat 2015). Further evidence of the importance of social factors refers to changes in the gender gap within one society across time. For example, as gender equality increases in Europe, the longevity gap is shrinking (Eurostat 2015). In China, the projection of current trends shows that as more people survive their 80th birthday, women become more prevalent in the last age group (Fig. 1).

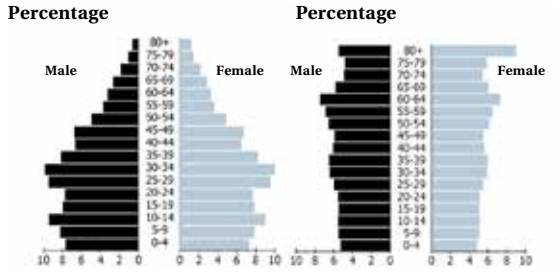

Fig 1. Chinese life expectancy pyramids in 2000 and 2050.
Source: World Population Prospects, 2004 revision (2005)[3].

3 http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2006/ChinasConcernOverPopulationAgingandHealth.aspx

Now, longevity may depend on social factors without also depending on gender-specific lifestyles. For social factors could include, for example, a reform in the publicly-funded health service or the adoption of a certain tradition or sport with an unexpected differential impact on male and female life expectancy. Improved hygiene and obstetric care, for example, reduced women's death in childbirth, creating a longevity gap which was not so noticeable before. Longevity varies from one society or one period to another for social, but not always gendered, reasons.

Let us assume, however, as Van Parijs does, that if the causes are social, they involve gender-based variations in lifestyle (see also Segall 2010: 108). The causes generally listed involve different factors. Some are unhealthy habits such as some pleasurable forms of consumption like drinking alcohol, smoking, taking drugs, or eating without measure whatever one fancies. Others involve risky activities such as speeding, drunk driving, dangerous sports, and the sort of behavior displayed in internet videos with labels such as "extreme idiots."[4] A third factor involves occupational hazards, and a fourth, violence or a greater tendency to commit suicide or homicide, or to be killed or injured in fights (see fig. 2).

	White, Non-Hispanic		Black, Non-Hispanic		Hispanic	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Injuries	70.8	22.3	49.0	14.8	55.7	13.0
Homicide	6.4	2.6	102.2	11.3	28.0	4.0
Suicide*	24.6	5.0	14.5	2.4	12.8	2.9
Cancer	6.0	4.5	6.7	6.3	5.7	5.4
Heart Disease	5.0	3.0	13.8	7.4	4.6	2.0
HIV**	—	—	—	5.7	—	—

Fig. 2: Leading causes of death for men and women aged 20-29 in the US in 2007, deaths per 100,000 (PRB 2010).

Most feminists, and perhaps most liberal egalitarians, tend to hold social rather than biological explanations of gendered behavior, and so they may find the lifestyle explanation of longevity plausible. This, however, does not commit them to the view that if a man's behavior is gendered, he is not liable to bear the burdens arising from it.

There are different explanations of why inferring a lack of liability is a *non sequitur*. I cannot review them all but several are not hard to guess. First, denying liability for the bad consequences of gendered behavior would

4 See, for example, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxAxbZeGtUA

have undesirable consequences as it would leave us without important incentives to avoid behavior that is both undesirable and gendered. Leaving consequences aside, one may argue that it is not fair that, while men can indulge in drinking and eating without gaining weight or being so strongly penalized by society, women must exercise self-restraint and then compensate men for not having exercised it. This is unfair because if A already had all the fun of a *carpe diem* lifestyle, B should be allowed to keep the benefits of the self-restraint exercised. Otherwise it would be like making women who diet pay for the slimming treatment of those who overeat. Second, since male violence and risk-taking are already among the main causes of death for young women, one could argue that women have already paid with a significant reduction in their own longevity and shared in the costs of male behavior. Regarding occupational hazards, some would argue that if both A and B want jobs, and jobs that involve (on-balance advantageous) combinations of benefits and drawbacks, it will be unfair to give A the job, and make B compensate A for the job´s drawbacks (including possible longevity losses).

Assuming it is not the dead but living people to whom compensation is or is not owed raises further problems. It would not make sense to compensate men who avoid all life-shortening behavior and are thus likely to live long. For then there will be nothing they have to be compensated for, and they will be unfairly enjoying both the extra years and the compensation for lacking them. But it would make even less sense to compensate individuals who, despite engaging in all the life-shortening gendered behavior, still escape the fate for which they are supposed to be compensated. We would be giving extra resources to people who remain alive despite their eating without self-restraint or their indulging in other imprudent activities. This seems just as implausible, if not more. It may seem more plausible if, instead of granting monetary compensations to the men who stay alive, we invested more on men's health and spent less on pregnancy or cervical cancer, as Shlomi Segall at one point suggests to illustrate the case (2010: 108). But if pecuniary compensations are not justified, neither are these in-kind compensations. If there is nothing to compensate men for, they will be enjoying both the extra years and the compensation, and this would be unfair. (Both pregnancy and cervical cancer, moreover, come about because of sperm, which arguably makes it even more unfair).

Another possibility would be to force men to adopt female lifestyles. But men may resist this option. This could be because they prefer life-shortening lifestyles or because they value having the *choice*, the mere opportunity of engaging in activities with some risk of self-harm.

Adapting an example proposed by Scanlon to explain the value of choice, let us imagine that there is an area with extremely nasty nettles in bloom

that cause a terrible rash (Scanlon 1998: 256).[5] The authorities mark the area and warn people about the consequences of wandering through the flowering nettles. Scanlon argues that even if it is difficult to see any value in getting a nasty rash, there is generic value in being able to choose rather than be forced to do the right thing all the time. Thus, having fenced off the area and issued all the warnings, we could say that society had done enough to protect individuals from the danger (see Scanlon 1998: 249-294; Voorhoeve 2008; Williams 2006).

Scanlon then asks us to imagine there is a curious woman who really wants to see what is happening in the fenced area, and so decides to go in to check it out (Scanlon 1998: 257). He denies she will then have a claim on society for help or compensation, since she had an adequate opportunity to avoid the harm. There could be exceptions to this conclusion that Scanlon would accept. For example, if we can stop her rash by showering her with the public park's watering hose, it would be such an easy rescue that she could have a complaint if she were not showered. In other cases, perhaps during a drought, she could not make such demands. Another plausible exception would be that of individuals or groups who are already victims of injustice or live below a minimum threshold and take some risks to escape their dire condition.

Since such exceptions do not apply to the case of men indulging in unhealthy habits, let us add to the picture some gender stereotypes and claim that the woman was a victim of female curiosity or love for flowers, and so was engaging in self-harming *gendered* behavior. Or suppose a man wants to enter the fenced area to show off how tough he is or because of a gendered sensation-seeking desire, or a gendered authority-defying attitude. Would this change anything? It is implausible to assume that the mere fact that such behavior can be associated with gender stereotypes makes a difference. It would make a difference if the signs were unclear or if the individuals were children. But adults who chose to ignore the clear signs do not have a legitimate complaint if they come out with a rash, regardless of whether theirs was a case of typically male, female, sport-fan, or ideological foolishness.

In the case of life-shortening gendered behavior, the case against compensation is even stronger that in the example of the nettles because incursion into the fenced area is a one-off event rather than recurrent behavior, like eating and drinking excessively, driving recklessly, picking fights, and general carelessness. If the behavior that causes a man to have

5 I have modified Scanlon's original example because it involved hazardous waste, which may suggest corporate responsibility for extremely nasty and premature deaths in deprived areas.

a shorter life span is traceable to choices that men pursue repeatedly, and even identify with, the case for compensation is even less plausible. Given that we cannot plausible claim society has not done enough for men, or compare the case to that of an easy rescue, liberal egalitarians who believe in accommodating the value of choice would not compensate men for undesirable, gendered behavior. Needless to say, for desert theorists, making the prudent, non-violent, law-abiding poor reward the imprudent, violent, careless rich is exactly the opposite of justice (see, for example, Arneson 2007). But let us now examine what follows if sex variations in longevity do not depend on behavior but respond to some other explanations scientists have proposed, and which I sum up below.

3. THE ASOCIAL HYPOTHESIS: THE EVOLUTIONARY EXPLANATIONS

On average, women live longer than men. It would be puzzling for scientists if they did not, as this is normal for females in other species. A traditional explanation in the case of humans is that estrogen protects women from cardiovascular disease. Another explanation is that having only one copy of the X chromosome makes males more vulnerable to harmful recessive mutations (Pan 2012).[6] The latter explanation could also account for the alleged female tendency to form a tighter cluster near the mean while more males are outliers, occupying more extreme (desirable and undesirable) positions (Cronin 2008).

Sexual differences in longevity, however, are greater in species with a history of polygyny (i.e., of males mating with several females) and tend to be greater the larger the size of the harems. Thus, in very polygynous mammals, like elephant seals, males are almost twice as large as females and females almost twice as long-lived as males.[7] In contrast, in less polygynous species, sex differences in either size or longevity may be much smaller. The massive bowhead whales can survive two centuries, while small insects may survive only two weeks because, *across* species, a large size correlates with longevity. By contrast, between the sexes of the *same* species, the reverse obtains: if the females of a species are much smaller than the males of the same species, they tend to live much longer.

6 A recently proposed explanation is that the quality-screening process of our mitochondrial genes only happens through females, and so mitochondrial mutations may be weeded out when they are harmful to females but not when they are harmful to males (Camus 2012).

7 Male southern elephant seals weigh 11,000 pounds and live around 15 years, whilst female southern elephant seals weigh 2,000 pounds and live around 24 years. See, for example, http://www.marinebio.net/marinescience/05nekton/esbody.htm.

In species with a polygynous history, when compared to females, males are: (i) larger and better armed or ornamented; (ii) more aggressive; (iii) more drawn to competitive interaction and aggressive play; (iv) more likely to engage in escalating violence, leading to injury or death; (v) more eager to mate; (vi) less discriminating about mates; (vii) more prone to high-risk behavior, particularly when pursuing females (Darwin 1872; Thornhill and Palmer 2000: 37); (viii) more likely to die prematurely in accidents, combat, or from disease (Daly and Wilson 1983); (ix) less long-lived through physiological malfunction (Hamilton 1966); and (x) conceived and born in larger numbers, roughly balancing their dying prematurely in larger numbers from violence, disease, malfunction, or imprudence (Alexander *et al*. 1979). These characteristics could cause men to lack some of the self-repair mechanisms that women have because there would not be much point in nature investing in self-repair systems for those likely to die of other causes anyway (Diamond 1993: 110).

Other explanations refer to the social usefulness of females for youngsters of either sex. In polygynous species, males are more expendable than females not only because fewer males are needed for reproduction, but because offspring benefit more from females. One example is the *grandmother effect*, observable in matriarchal societies like those of orcas, where older females guide and protect the young, surviving menopause and outliving males by several decades (Brault and Caswell 1993). Think too about how male lions wait for the females to bring home the bacon, and having killed all the cubs they did not sire, leave only scraps for their own offspring to eat. Youngsters sometimes do so much better without their large, sexually aggressive male parent around that the best such males can do for their offspring is what some actually do: go away and die to avoid competing with their own kin.

Longevity is known to correlate not only with size in the two ways explained above but also with cultural transmission. Elephants, great apes, and other highly intelligent, self-aware, cultural creatures, like orcas, lactate for many years. They do so not because they need the milk, but because they need to intersperse the pregnancies to allow mothers enough time to provide their offspring with an education. Lactation, however, is also connected to the high incidence of polygyny in mammals, since such devoted mothers are very easy to exploit: they will not abandon the offspring in which they have invested so greatly, even if they are abandoned or exploited themselves. The large investment per infant typical of these species is adaptive because its members are long-lived, so education and cultural transmission tends to pay off. In the case of humans, the large human brain required for extensive learning involves large additional costs for child-bearing women, and this

may have also resulted in their greater longevity: a very large brain for babies, combined with a pelvis not initially designed for bipedal walking, makes human births exceptionally dangerous even for young and healthy mothers. Given these facts, if women died younger and were fertile until they were about to die, both mothers and their infants would die in even larger numbers. Female longevity might then be a consequence of how much more costly it is to have offspring for female humans compared to other female primates (Diamond 1993: 117). And since mothers pass their genes to their sons, men could have then benefited from an increase in their longevity (relative to that of all other apes) without having to pay the costs.

Appealing to these considerations, some may respond to Van Parijs in at least four ways. First, one may respond by arguing that the main beneficiaries of female longevity are actually men. Female longevity is not a trait that is explained by its benefits for females but by its benefits to offspring of both sexes. Moreover, possessing this trait comes at a high price for women since it is connected to the extraordinary danger and difficulty involved in giving birth, as well as to smaller size in females, and inequality and reproductive exploitation. Without paying these costs, men also benefit from female longevity since they benefit when they are young males, they benefit from their own offspring being safe, and it is likely that they have also benefited with increases in their own longevity. On this view, then, one could argue that is not males, but rather females that ought to be compensated for the costs of securing collective longevity.

A second reply would involve arguing that the inequality in longevity is not unjust because its removal would make humans worse off. If so, Rawlsians, for example, would deny such beneficial inequalities are unjust. If these explanations are correct, Van Parijs' assumption that, if longevity has a biological explanation, then men's lack of female longevity is unjust, would be a *non sequitur*.

A third answer to Van Parijs would be to argue that if males die younger because of their propensity to attack others in order to monopolize more females, while females live longer because of their useful caring services, in a way we are back to the explanation of longevity in terms of "gendered" lifestyles discussed earlier. Van Parijs, however, may argue that evidence of gendered lifestyles having evolutionary roots only reduces men's liability. But this is too rushed. First, everything has evolutionary roots, and we do not generally deny all liability. Second, for some theories of liability, the fact that humans have an evolutionary past is taken for granted and makes no difference at all. Third, we are sufficiently monogamous and sufficiently unlike seals, orcas, and lions that although some may be tempted to behave like such animals, we are not hardwired to do so, and most of us do not.

A fourth and final answer to Van Parijs is to deny compensation on the ground that a trait cannot be considered an advantage when it is inextricably linked to other traits that cannot, on the whole, be considered an advantage, which is precisely what scientists are telling us with these explanations.

Ronald Dworkin and other advocates of *equality of resources* (Dworkin 2000), for example, would deny that individuals have any claim simultaneously to enjoy the advantages of a condition and the advantages of lacking the condition. Take a case (suggested to me by Andrew Williams) involving a basketball player whose exceptional success depends on unusual height that is also correlated with premature death and terrible backaches. Dworkin would deny another shorter player is relatively disadvantaged in a compensation-supporting sense when he prefers only the taller player's success, and does not regret lacking the package of traits on which it depends. On this view, men have no legitimate complaint regarding female longevity because, as the biological explanations suggest, giving birth and living a few more years are tightly linked and part of the same package, like the height and the backache, the suffering and the medals. And people are not entitled to have their cake and eat it too, enjoy an able body and yet insist in competing in the Paralympics, or be compensated for not being able to do so.

There are, moreover, further arguments against compensating men inspired by Dworkin's work on equality. As many readers probably know, for Dworkin a fair distribution of external resources is one which could have emerged from a hypothetical auction where individuals enjoy equal bidding power (2002: 67). When the process is complete nobody envies the bundle of resources others have ended up with, since they could have also bid for those resources themselves. Against this background of equality of resources, equally situated individuals then purchase insurance against what they *by their own lights* consider a relative misfortune (Clayton 2000; Williams 2002, 2004).

Now, since men do not normally regard being male as such a misfortune, they are not entitled to compensation for lacking female longevity, or female hormones, or female breasts. By contrast, some transgender persons who very much want to have female bodies, and even give birth and breastfeed, with or without the extra longevity, but have a male anatomy, should be compensated. Dworkin's view supports assisting these individuals with their sex-reassignment needs through a publicly-funded health service because people would have insured against being born with a body which does not match their self-identified sex when others possess such a body.

Some may worry that this Dworkinian criterion for justifying or denying compensations depending on whether individuals identify with their condition may not always favor feminist demands. In response to this worry, one may

argue that the Dworkinian criterion cannot be used against feminist demands because what women want (equal pay, respect, political representation, and so on) has nothing to do with being male or female. Few expressions in the history of thought are as unfortunate as the Freudian and Lacanian "penis envy," when what women want and demand does not depend on maleness or anatomy. Thus, if men do not suffer from the reverse condition (say "womb envy") but are perfectly happy to be men, and identify with being men and do not consider being male a misfortune, they have no claim to compensation because in their own opinion they are not the victims of bad luck. They would have insured against illness or disability but not against being male.

The same will apply to a religious believer who ends up not only with a lower life expectancy but lower welfare throughout his life because of the constant fasting that his religion demands. If this person identifies with his faith and does not regard it as a craving or disability, he does not have a complaint. He cannot both pity the atheist's lack of faith and think of his own faith as a blessing whilst still plausibly claim to suffer from relatively bad luck. Similarly, there is no injustice if this believer dies younger purely as a result of a faith he welcomes and the corresponding religious activity he willingly pursues (Dworkin 2002: 119, 138; Williams 2002: 378).

Dworkin's account, thus, is an example of a view that does not claim that justice concerns exclusively that which has a social origin, and still denies that men's lack of female longevity constitutes an injustice.

Van Parijs may want to reject Dworkin's account and all forms of egalitarian liberalism that conclude men's lack of female longevity is not unjust, and he may be able to offer good reasons for doing so. My main point, however, is that his road map is not exhaustive: there are more exit routes on offer than he allows. In fact, Van Parijs even omits to mention his own proposal regarding how to evaluate variations in internal assets, namely *undominated diversity*, according to which targeted transfers and other measures must make sure that no person's lifetime internal endowments are regarded by all as inferior to that of someone else (Van Parijs 1997, ch. 3). On this view, men are owed no compensation because there is no agreement on their endowment being inferior – there may even be a consensus on the denial of this claim. So it seems that not only Scanlonians and Dworkinians but even Van Parijsians may deny it is unjust that men lack female longevity.

Regarding Rawls, his theory of justice has been widely interpreted as denying that it is unjust that men lack female longevity (Barclay 1999; Segall 2010, 99ff and Clayton 2001). The first statement of his view was understood as claiming that justice requires equalizing individuals' natural primary

goods when a deficit in those goods resulted in an unequal access to social primary goods, namely income, wealth, the basic liberties, and the social bases of self-respect. Since men are not disadvantaged in their access to social primary goods, however, there is no injustice that needs to be corrected. Rawls' later *Justice as Fairness. A Restatement* (2001), however, contains a section on Sen's capability approach (Rawls 2001: 168-176), which suggests that the widely held interpretation may not be the only position a Rawlsian may take in this debate. Instead, some Rawlsians may argue that longevity is a capability and that enjoying greater capabilities matters even if it does not alter an individual's access to primary goods. So Rawlsians may accept that differences in longevity can have independent relevance for justice. Since most people disregard this aspect of Rawls' restatement of his theory, we can safely conclude that most liberal egalitarians deny that men's lack of female longevity is unjust.

Let us now turn to the final question Van Parijs raises which concerns the value rather than origins of greater female longevity.

4. IS FEMALE LONGEVITY A SIGNIFICANT BENEFIT?

Van Parijs begins by granting that having some extra years may not be significantly valuable, and that concession seem plausible. Women's extra years may come when they are too old, weak, disabled, or dependent to achieve anything very valuable with the extra time. They may spend most of the time asleep, ill, in and out of hospital, and with their mind and energy focused on coping with the problems of female old-age: frequent falls and fractures, arthritis, incontinence, deafness (cutting people off socially, which affects women more), stress, insomnia, depression, and dementia, which claim more female than male victims.

Longevity, then, is only *conditionally* valuable, and the last few years of one's life are the ones more likely to detract from the total value of one's overall existence. As Van Parijs notes, it would be great to have some extra years if they could be "squeezed in at age 30 or 40" (2015: 82) rather than prolonging the worst bit of one's life. I agree again. Van Parijs, however, goes on to add: "But this is a confusion. What hides behind the gap between the average lengths of women's and men's lives is a greater probability for a woman to reach and enjoy her forties, her fifties, her sixties, etc., not only her nineties" (82). Van Parijs does not indicate the extent to which men's prospects of reaching middle age are smaller than women's, and if that gap is not itself significant, he has not made any progress in showing that women enjoy a significant benefit here. Moreover, Van Parijs does not cite any data supporting his claim, and population pyramids like those indicated earlier (Fig. 1) suggest that the number of males and females at ages 30 and 40 remain largely the

same until we reach the very last, and least desirable, stage of life. Thus, even if his qualification is relevant, the differences in probabilities may not be sufficiently large as to constitute a significant advantage.

There are also likely to be regional variations, and so depending on your birthplace you may be a victim of female infanticide or die in childhood from "the pattern of neglect" (the systematic dismissal of a daughter's nutritional or medical needs), you may be killed by your rapist, stoned by religious fanatics, burned for witchcraft, killed for dowry, or die in childbirth or from domestic violence. As different factors combine, over a hundred million women are missing (Sen 1990). Of course, things are different in developed societies. But there, if you are prudent and look after yourself, the chances of dying young are so small for both women and men that some small difference in what is already a remote chance may not be very significant.

In addition, as Van Parijs notes, women are not only poorer but also need to stretch their scarcer resources over more years, which makes them in one respect poorer still. Having said this, however, he adds that there is an income difference (and he mentions income differences of 5%, 1% and 0.01%) that individuals would accept in exchange for increased longevity. Three observations are needed here. First, women do not only have to stretch the fewer resources they have over a few more (equally costly) years. In fact, it is in those final years that the costs of surviving often skyrocket. Second, women are not only poorer but *much* poorer than men and *much* worse paid. And so that the reader is not left with the wrong impression, it is worth noting that income differences are much larger than those Van Parijs suggests in his thought experiment. In Spain, for instance, the gender income difference is 33.7% (Eurostat 2015b), so that if a man makes 1,000€€a month, the woman would only make 666€, receiving just 2€€for every 3€€a man secures. Third, just as we cannot imagine that the extra years are additional years in our 30's or 40's, we cannot imagine these are additional years of a typical *male* life, with all the drinking or speeding included. For the alleged advantage consists mainly in the final years of a *female* life, with its poverty, illness, stress, and subordination to men.

It is unlikely, then, that men would prefer these female 'advantages', and if they are tempted to do so they should consider Van Parijs' final, and most original, observation regarding longevity. He notes that besides living longer, women

> *are also on average two or three years younger than their male partner. This means that far more women than men are likely to still be around when their ageing partner is becoming frail and dependent. As long as much of the elderly care required in these circumstances is performed*

> *within the household, the necessary consequence is a very significant inequality in the amount of domestic elderly care work performed by the two genders, which — as lives get longer and children fewer — may approximate or even exceed the size of the inequality in the respective amounts of domestic child care. Note that this holds even under the unrealistic assumption that both the will and capacity to care for their partner are the same for men and women. In this light, men's lower life expectancy might be interpreted as a trick to extract more care work out of women* (2015: 82).

What this means is that women's somewhat longer lives are not really theirs: whatever their vocation, they are effectively conscripted as nurses, cooks, and cleaners. Not long after they finish cleaning and feeding their children, they may end up stuck with the far less pleasant chore of cleaning and feeding old men, often first their own father and then their elderly spouse. Having looked after their partner day and night, they then see them die, and go on to age and die alone themselves. Van Parijs sees no way out of this. Since deterring men from marrying younger women seems difficult, if not impossible, and getting them to outsource their elderly care seems to him not only costly but undesirable, he thinks we face here a blind alley. If we accept this pessimistic conclusion, it becomes easier to deny men are missing out on any significant benefit. But perhaps we should explore ways to change women's situation in those final years.

Let us consider the age gap first. The age between spouses correlates with higher divorce rates (Francis-Tan and Mialon 2015), and so we may have additional reasons to nudge people into reconsidering divorcing to marry somebody much younger. Van Parijs himself once proposed a tax on the age difference between partners to reduce the chances of the wife leaving a less senior job than her husband's in order to care for their children (Van Parijs 2001). Such a tax could serve other functions too, and it could even be progressive: the rate could be adjusted so an elderly millionaire starting his fourth marriage to a barely adult beauty queen would pay a higher tax than a less wealthy man whose marriage involves a smaller age gap. And since the gap correlates with income inequality and other aspects of the social structure (Casterline 1986), it may also spontaneously shrink as society becomes more just.

Regarding elderly care, I favor more outsourcing. Some countries outsource care by combining the elderly individual's savings with state aid, for example, by advancing funds that the state can then recover once the deceased's home is sold. Most developed countries outsource childcare despite the fact that it is important for the development of the child (but often not for the elderly) to be cared for by a specific person, and despite

the fact that it is far more delightful for a person to wash and feed her own child than an old man. One may prefer to see and talk to one's spouse or female relative rather than a paid carer, but then one can always invite them to visit rather than force them to be there performing all sorts of tasks, such as treating bedsores, that not everybody is cut out for. Caring for an elderly person often requires the ability not to feel faint or nauseous when confronted with certain sights and smells, the ability not to take criticisms personally, and the strength not to drop a man's body when moving it. If a young male professional is much better than an aging wife at all of this, it is not desirable to rely on her performing such tasks.

Moreover, it is unfair that after a lifetime of being paid so much more, men could go on to expect women to care for them *gratis*. Instead, everybody should feel under a duty to save to avoid becoming, in effect, slave-drivers in their old age. I certainly do not see how one could have a right to turn a rare and modest advantage for women into yet more unpaid and unchosen female labor. As Dworkin would say, we may disagree about to what extent we should compensate people for a certain disability, but we should agree that a just society will not turn individuals' natural advantages into a liability by engaging in some sort of slavery for either the talented or the long-lived.

CONCLUSION

Van Parijs claims that lacking female longevity is an injustice against men, if it is caused by a gendered lifestyle. I have argued that on some plausible views, such as Thomas Scanlon's, at least under some circumstances in which society can be said to have "done enough" for some individuals, they can be expected to bear the consequences of their life-shortening behavior, whether or not it is influenced by gender stereotypes. Van Parijs also argues that if men's lack of female longevity is due to asocial factors, then it is an injustice against men. I have argued that on some plausible views, such as Ronald Dworkin's, it is not an injustice if, as scientists suggest, having female longevity is inextricably linked to being female, and men identify with their condition and do not consider it bad brute luck. Finally, Van Parijs notes various reasons to deny female longevity is a significant benefit. One of them concerns the informal conscription of unpaid female labor for elderly care. I have argued such conscription should end. Until it does, however, I agree with Van Parijs that it greatly diminishes the value of what was already at most a very modest benefit.

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